

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-12

INFO OCT-01 IO-14 ISO-00 NEAE-00 CU-04 CIAE-00 COME-00

EB-11 INR-10 LAB-06 NSAE-00 RSC-01 SIL-01 EUR-25

NIC-01 OMB-01 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 L-03 NSC-07 PA-04

PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 SCCT-02 SAM-01 SAB-01

TRSE-00 DRC-01 /155 W

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P R 221417Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 7033

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

USINT DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

USMISSION GENEVA

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USINT BAGHDAD

C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 3348

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINS PINT LE

SUBJECT: LEBANESE INTERNAL SITUATION

REF: BEIRUT 3056

SUMMARY: WEEK OF INCREASING VIOLENCE ENDED IN TRUCE
OVER WEEKEND AS STUDENTS, TRADE UNIONS, POLITICIANS,
GOVERNMENT AND LEFTIST GROUPS ASSESS RESPECTIVE POSI-
TIONS AND DECIDE UPON ACTIONS FOR NEXT WEEK. TAKIEDDINE
SOLH CABINET WEAKENED STILL FURTHER BY ITS OBVIOUS IN-
DECISION IN COPING WITH STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS AND IN-
CREASING POPULAR RESENTMENT OVER DETERIORATING SOCIO-
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ECONOMIC SITUATION. ON OTHER HAND, PUBLIC TURNING AGAINST

STUDENTS AND OTHER DEMONSTRATORS AS RESULT VANDALISM
AND VIOLENCE WHICH MARKED MARCH 21 DEMONSTRATIONS.
END SUMMARY.

1. WEEK BEGAN WITH MAJOR RALLY BY SHIA IMAM MUSA SADR
AT BAALBECK WHERE AN ESTIMATED 35 TO 50,000 SHIAS
FROM ALL OVER COUNTRY GATHERED TO DEMONSTRATE SUPPORT
FOR SADR AND ATTACK FAILURE OF GOL AND TOP SHIA
POLITICIAN KAMAL ASSAD (PRESIDENT OF NATIONAL ASSEMBLY)
TO MEET PROBLEMS OF SMIA COMMUNITY AND POOR REGIONS OF
LEBANON WHERE SHIA POPULATION CONCENTRATED (SOUTH AND
BAALBECK-HERME 1). SIZE OF RALLY, FACT THAT 5,000 OR
MORE OF PARTICIPANTS WERE ARMED, OBVIOUS ENTHUSIASMS
WHICH SADR GENERATES AMONG SHIAS, AND NERVOUS REACTION
OF GOL AND ASSAD (AND SUNNI MUSLEMS) ARE CLEAR INDICA-
TORS OF LONG TERM POLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THIS SUDDEN
SHIA AWAKENINJ WHICH DERIVES STRENGTH FROM POVERTY AND
OTHER BASIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS AS WELL AS RELIGION
AND SADR'S PERSONAL CHARISMA. SADR RECEIVING QUIET
SUPPORT FROM SEVERAL POLITICAL FIGURES AND VARIOUS
LEFTIST GROUPS, PARTICULARLY LEBANESE WING OF
IRAQI BAATH.

2. STUDENT STRIKES BECAME INCREASINGLY WIDESPREAD AS
WEEK PROGRESSED, DEVELOPING INTO LARGE-SCALE DEMON-
STRATIONS (IN 5,000 RANGE) ON MARCH 20 AND 21ST. ON
MARCH 20 THERE WERE MANY VIOLENT CLASHES BETWEEN SECURITY
FORCES AND DEMONSTRATORS, WITH BOTH SIDES OCCASIONALLY
USING FIREARMS. ONE TAXI DRIVER KILLED BY GENDARME,
SCORE OR MORE GE DARMES AND DEMONSTRATORS INJURED. ON MARCH 21
DEMONSTRATIONS BECAME MORE VIOLENT WHILE SECURITY FORCES HELD
BACK UNDER URDERS FROM GOVT WHICH APPREHENSIVE OVER CHARGES IT
USED EXCESSIVE FORCE MARCH 20. DEMONSTRATORS TORE UP LAMP
POLES, STREET SIGNS, TREES, ETC., BLOCKED ROADS, BURNED
CARS, ATTACKED SECURITY FORCES, DAMAGED PAN AM OFFICE
AND JAPANESE DEPARTMENT STORE IN BEIRUT, AND SACKED
TOWN IN SIDON. THERE WERE MANY RELIABLE REPORTS OF
OLDER LEFTIST ELEMENTS, SOME OF THEM SYRIAN AND
PALESTINIAN, PARTICIPATING IN MOST VIOLENT DEMONSTRATIONS.
AMERICAN UNIVERSITY CAMPUS WAS RALLYING POINT FOR
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DEMONSTRATORS FROM ALL BEIRUT UNIVERSITIES AND SEVERAL
SECONDARY SCHOOLS. AUB STUDENTS HAVE OCCUPIED SEVERAL
BUILDINGS AND CONTROL CAMPUS WHERE VIRTUALLY NO CLASSES
HELD DURING WEEK. AUB PRESIDENT HAS ISSUED STATEMENT
CANCELLING EASTER VACATION AND THREATENING CANCEL
SEMESTER UNLESS CLASSES RESUME NEXT WEEK.

3. LEFT-WING ELEMENTS IN LABOR MOVEMENT AGITATING FOR

LARGE POPULAR DEMNSTRATION (NOT EXCLUSIVELY UNION)
AGAINST RISING COST OF LIVING
ON MARCH 27 AND GENERAL
STRIKE ON APRIL 2. IT UNCLEAR AS YET TO WHAT DEGREE
THEY WILL SUCCEED, BUT POPULAR RESENTMENT VERY STRONG
AS RESULT INFLATIONARY SURGE OVER PAST FEW WEEKS AND
APPROACHING UNION ELECTIONS MAY FORCE MODERATE
LEADERS PLAY ALONG WITH LEFTISTS. GOL MOVED TO KEEP
DOWN PRICE OF BREAD AND COOL OFF WORKER ANGER BY
THREATENING TEMPORRILY TAKE OVER BAKERIES WHICH ON
STRIKE BECAUSE GOL WOULD NOT ALLOW 20 PERCENT IN-
CREASE IN PRICE OF BREAD.

4. MOST POLITICAL LEADERS TENDED SUPPORT STUDENTS
EARLY IN WEEK, BOTH BECAUSE OF SERIOUS WEAKNESSES IN
LEBANESE EDUCATION AND BECAUSE STUDENTS OFFERED MEANS
OF DISPLAYING OPPOSITION TO TAKIEDDINE SOLH CABINET
WHICH HAS VERY SCANTY RECORD OF ACCOMPLISHMENTS, BUT
WHICH HAS SHOW NO DISPOSITION STEP DOWN. VIOLENCE
OF MARCH 21 DENOUNCED BY SEVERAL POLITICAL LEADERS,
BOT GOL INDECISION AND WEAKNESS IN COPING WITH
DEMONSTRATIONS, AS WELL AS OVERALL RECORD, HAS INCREASED
HOSTILITY TO CABINET AMONG DEPUTIES, INCLUDING SHARP
QUESTIONING FROM SOME WHO HAVE HERETOFORE BEEN STALWART
SUPPORTERS. MINISTER OF INTERIOR HAS STATED HE PERSONALLY
INTENDS ASK FOR VOTE OF CONFIDENCE NEXT WEEK.

5. BEIRUT AND REST OF COUNTRY GENERALLY CALM MORNING
MARCH 22 AND EXPECTED REMAIN SO OVER LONG HOLIDAY WEEK-
END. STUDENT LEADERS HAVE CALLED FOR MASS MEETING EVENING
MARCH 23 TO DECIDE ON TACTICS FOR NEXT WEEK. UNION
LEADERS SCHEDULED MEET MACH 25. POLITICAL LEADERS AND
GOL OFFICIALS WILL ALSO BE USING WEEKEND TO ASSESS
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GENERAL SITUATION AND RELATIVE POLITICAL STRENGTHS
BEFORE DECIDING WHAT TO DO NEXT. PUBLIC SEEMS TO HAVE TURNED
AGAINST STUDENT AS RESULT
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